

# USDA CROSS TRAINING PROGRAM

## ONLINE AGLEARN TRAINING

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USDA's mission is to provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy and the best available science and efficient management. Accomplishing our mission, in large part, refers to how well we serve our customers, their level of satisfaction, and the results produced by our delivery processes. Often, customers are aware of needs, but not certain how to access USDA programs or services that will meet their specific needs.

The **USDA Cross Training Initiative** is designed to ensure that USDA employees serving the public are familiar with the full range of services, grants and loan programs available to their constituents, and to improve customer service. Employees in the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development Agencies who directly serve the public will benefit by cross training to better serve USDA constituents by providing useful and timely information about available programs and services. In an effort to further empower USDA partners, in Phase II of the initiative, Community Based Organization and other outreach organization staff members will also be given access to the training.

Remember, all USDA employees are customer service agents.

**OBJECTIVES:** The USDA Cross Training Initiative has two main objectives:

- Enhance USDA employees' knowledge of USDA services, grants, and loan programs so that they may better serve the public
- Enhance USDA's partners' knowledge of USDA services, grants, and loan programs so they may better educate the public on USDA program and services

**INTENDED AUDIENCE:** This training is for you if:

- You are a field office employee.
- You are an employee in the Farm Services Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, or Rural Development Agency that shares information with the public about USDA services, grants and loans.
- You are a supervisor or manager of an employee that falls into either of the aforementioned categories.

**DURATION:** 8 to 10 hours

**PROGRAM COMPONENTS:** The USDA Cross Training Initiative has seven components (see component details on next pages):

1. The Agricultural Marketing Service Courses
2. The Farm Services Agency Courses
3. The Natural Resources Conservation Service Courses
4. The Risk Management Agency Courses
5. The Rural Development Agencies Courses

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6. The End-of-Course Evaluation for each Agency Curriculum
7. The Cross Curricular Scenario-Based Assessment (Phase II of project to be available by the end of fiscal year 2013)

**PROGRAM COMPONENTS DESCRIPTION:** Following is a description and detailed information about the USDA Cross Training Program.

### **Program Component 1 – Agricultural Marketing Service Courses (2 total)**

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers programs that facilitate the efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products, including food, fiber, and specialty crops. AMS provides the agriculture industry with valuable services that help ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country. The agency supports agriculture through a variety of programs including: Dairy Programs; Fruit and Vegetable Program; Livestock, Poultry and Seed Program; Cotton and Tobacco Program; National Organic Program; Science and Technology Program; and the Transportation and Marketing Program. From individual farmers to international businesses, the Agency's mission is to support American agriculture, helping the U.S. remain competitive in a global marketplace.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: AMS Organic 101*** ***USDA-CTP-AMS-001***

The goal of Organic 101 and 201 is to help USDA employees better understand the needs of alternative agricultural producers. This understanding will allow employees to make USDA programs and services more accessible and to connect them with appropriate resources.

Organic 101 is an introductory level course that provides the fundamentals of organic agriculture. This course provides an overview of the USDA Organic label, explains the meaning of organic and the certification process, and describes USDA resources for organic producers and others.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: AMS Organic 201*** ***USDA-CTP-AMS-002***

The goal of Organic 101 and 201 is to help USDA employees better understand the needs of alternative agricultural producers. This understanding will allow employees to make USDA programs and services more accessible and to connect them with appropriate resources.

Organic 201 is an intermediate level course that provides an overview of the organic standards, certification, and enforcement.

### **Program Component 2 – Farm Services Agency Courses (3 total)**

The Farm Services Agency (FSA) ensures the well-being of American agriculture, the environment, and the American public through commodity programs; farm ownership, operating, and emergency loans; conservation and environmental programs; emergency and disaster

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assistance; and domestic and international food assistance. FSA programs are delivered through an extensive network of field offices. The FSA curriculum has three courses. Each course has a brief description. These courses can be located by searching the catalog for either the course title or course number.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: FSA Overview*** ***USDA-CTP-FSA-001***

This course is an overview of FSA; its mission, vision and a brief history of the Agency.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: FSA Loan Programs*** ***USDA-CTP-FSA-002***

A high-level overview designed to familiarize the learner with the loan programs available to farmers and ranchers. The course provides an introduction to direct and guaranteed loans, along with farm storage facility loans.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: FSA Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)*** ***USDA-CTP-FSA-003***

A basic introduction to NAP including intent, eligibility for services, qualified causes of loss, and application process for coverage and assistance.

### **Program Component 3 – Natural Resources Conservation Service Courses (6 total)**

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps people preserve the land through scientifically based, locally led voluntary conservation. NRCS is the lead Federal agency in conserving and improving natural resources on privately-owned lands. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance that make land more productive and the environment healthier through reduced soil erosion; improved soil, water, and air quality; energy conservation; restored woodlands and wetlands; enhanced fish and wildlife habitat; and reduced upstream flooding. The NRCS curriculum has six courses listed below. Each course has a brief description. These courses can be located by searching the catalog for either the course title or course number.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS Overview*** ***USDA-CTP-NRCS-001***

This course explores the origins of NRCS, its mission, vision, and the role of NRCS regarding public and private lands along with NRCS' primary customers.

#### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance Program*** ***USDA-CTP-NRCS-002***

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program is the foundation program of NRCS. This course provides an overview of how the CTA differs from other NRCS financial assistance programs.

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### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS Partners*** ***USDA-CTP-NRCS-003***

NRCS partners with many different local groups including farmers and ranchers, landowners, local conservation districts and tribes. The Partners course assists the learner in understanding how conservation districts are formed and function. This course also explores the nuances of the partnerships established with various groups.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS Conservation Programs Part I*** ***USDA-CTP-NRCS-004***

NRCS works to reduce soil loss from erosion; solve soil, water, and agricultural waste management problems; reduce damage caused by excess water and sedimentation; and enhance fish and wildlife habitats. The Conservation Programs Part I course explores the various Working Lands Programs aimed at addressing these very serious issues for agricultural lands. These programs are the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program and the Agricultural Management Assistance Program.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS Conservation Programs Part II*** ***USDA-CTP-NRCS-005***

The Conservation Programs Part II course explores the four NRCS Conservation Easement Programs. These programs are the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and the Wetland Reserve Program.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS Wetland and Highly Erodible Land Compliance*** ***USDA-CTP-NRCS-006***

Title XII of the Food Security Act introduced conservation provisions to address environmental concerns associated with soil erosion and wetland conversion. The Wetland and Highly Erodible Land Compliance course will assist the learner in understanding the objectives of conservation compliance and the impact of the amount of land area lost annually to converted wetlands.

## **Program Component 4 – Risk Management Agency Courses (2 total)**

The Risk Management Agency (RMA) administers the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation programs and promotes national welfare by improving the economic stability of agriculture through a secure system of crop insurance and risk management tools. RMA meets the crop insurance and risk management needs of the Nation's farmers and ranchers through a network of public and private-sector partners. The RMA curriculum has two courses listed below. Each course has a brief description. The courses can be located by searching the catalog for either the course title or course number.

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### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: RMA Crop Insurance 101*** ***USDA-CTP-RMA-001***

This course provides an overview of the Risk Management Agency as a whole, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, and the Federal Crop Insurance Program. This course offers the learner an introduction to how each was created, as well as their missions, structures and functions of the organizations and programs.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: RMA Crop Insurance Cycle*** ***USDA-CTP-RMA-002***

In this course, the learner will become familiar with the six main steps of the crop insurance cycle and what occurs at each step throughout the cycle.

## **Program Component 5 – Rural Development Courses (4 total)**

Rural Development (RD) delivers a board array of financial and technical resources that address the needs and concerns of rural Americans. RD is committed to helping improve the quality of life in rural communities through financial programs that support housing, emergency response facilities, water and waste systems, telecommunications and electric services. RD promotes economic development in rural communities by providing funding for the establishment and growth of local businesses and cooperatives. RD serves as a vehicle for providing meaningful support to rural America in a variety of ways. The RD curriculum has four courses listed below. Each course has a brief description. These courses can be located by searching the catalog for either the course title or course number.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: RD Overview*** ***USDA-CTP-RD-001***

This course provides a broad overview of RD programs. The learner will become familiar with the needs of rural communities and be able to counsel and educate customers on the programs and services that best match their needs.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: RD Rural Business-Cooperative Service Programs*** ***USDA-CTP-RD-002***

This course provides an overview of the programs and services administered by the Rural Business-Cooperative Service. Programs are focused in the areas of business, energy, and cooperatives.

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### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: RD Housing and Community Facilities Programs*** ***USDA-CTP-RD-003***

This course provides an overview of the programs offered through the Housing and Community Facilities including community facilities, single family housing, and multi-family housing programs.

### ***USDA Cross Training Programs: RD Rural Utilities Service Programs*** ***USDA-CTP-RD-004***

This course provides an overview of the rural electric, telecommunications, water and environmental programs; their primary purpose and value to the communities they serve.

### **Program Component 6 – The End-of-Course Evaluation for each Course**

Field staff, supervisors and managers are in one of the best positions to assist Agency curriculum developers in keeping information up to date and accurate. Each time a course is completed, it is of utmost importance that the custom end-of-course evaluation should also be submitted with feedback and/or recommendations. Thoughtful responses will assist the curriculum developers with providing quality training to all USDA staff.

### **Program Component 7 – The Cross Curricular Scenario-Based Assessment**

In Phase II of this project, a Cross Curricular Scenario-Based Assessment will be developed to test learner retention. There will also be ancillary quick reference materials developed to assist employees in determining which Agency programs best address a customer's needs. Recall that the purpose of the training is to prepare employees to direct customers to the Agency that is best equipped to assist them per their needs. Below are links to additional resources that provide some background knowledge as to why the Cross Training Program was initiated. Please review them as need at your convenience.

### **GETTING STARTED**

If you are an employee for whom the USDA Cross Training Programs will be mandatory, the entire curriculum (count 17 courses) will be added to your To-Do List by your Agency AgLearn Administrator. For other employees that wish to take the courses individually, locate the desired USDA Cross Training Programs courses in AgLearn, add it to your To-Do List, then complete the course and the survey when finished. Here's how:

1. Log into AgLearn: <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov>.
2. From the **Home** page in the menu column on the right, click on the **Browse** link.
3. Once on the **Catalog Search** page, in the **Search** field type USDA Cross Training Programs: (Agency Acronym) (i.e. *USDA Cross Training Programs: NRCS*).
4. Click on the **Go** button.

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5. The search results will return a list of USDA Cross Training Program courses.
6. Scroll through the list and select the desired course(s) by clicking the **Add to To-Do List** button located on the right of the page.
7. The AMS curriculum contains (2) courses. The AMS courses are not searchable as courses separate from the Cross Training curriculum using the identifier in step three (i.e. *USDA Cross Training Programs: AMS*). To locate them separately, use the following titles: 'USDA Organic 101: What Does the Organic Label Mean?' and 'USDA Organic 201: A Closer Look at the National Organic Program.' The FSA curriculum contains three (3) courses. The NRCS curriculum contains six (6) courses. The RMA curriculum contains two (2) courses. The RD curriculum contains four (4) courses. Each course will appear in your "To-Do List."
8. After completing each course, be sure to take the survey to obtain credit for the course. The survey will appear in your To-Do list on your home page.
9. When you submit the survey, you may have to select the Home tab on the top of the page to return to your courses. You will need to go into your To-Do List to take the next course.

#### Additional References

The Business Case for the Cultural Transformation of USDA

[http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/vwControlPanel/Control+Panel+Settings/\\$FILE/The%20USDA%20Business%20Case%20for%20Cultural%20Transformation%202010%20FINAL.pdf](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/vwControlPanel/Control+Panel+Settings/$FILE/The%20USDA%20Business%20Case%20for%20Cultural%20Transformation%202010%20FINAL.pdf)

Employee Listening Sessions: The Cultural Transformation of USDA, June 2010

[http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/vwControlPanel/Control+Panel+Settings/\\$FILE/Employee%20Listening%20Report.pdf](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/vwControlPanel/Control+Panel+Settings/$FILE/Employee%20Listening%20Report.pdf)

The Cultural Transformation of USDA: Creating an Inclusive, High-Performance Organization

[http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/vwControlPanel/Control+Panel+Settings/\\$FILE/USDA%20Cultural%20Transformation%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/vwControlPanel/Control+Panel+Settings/$FILE/USDA%20Cultural%20Transformation%20Report_FINAL.pdf)